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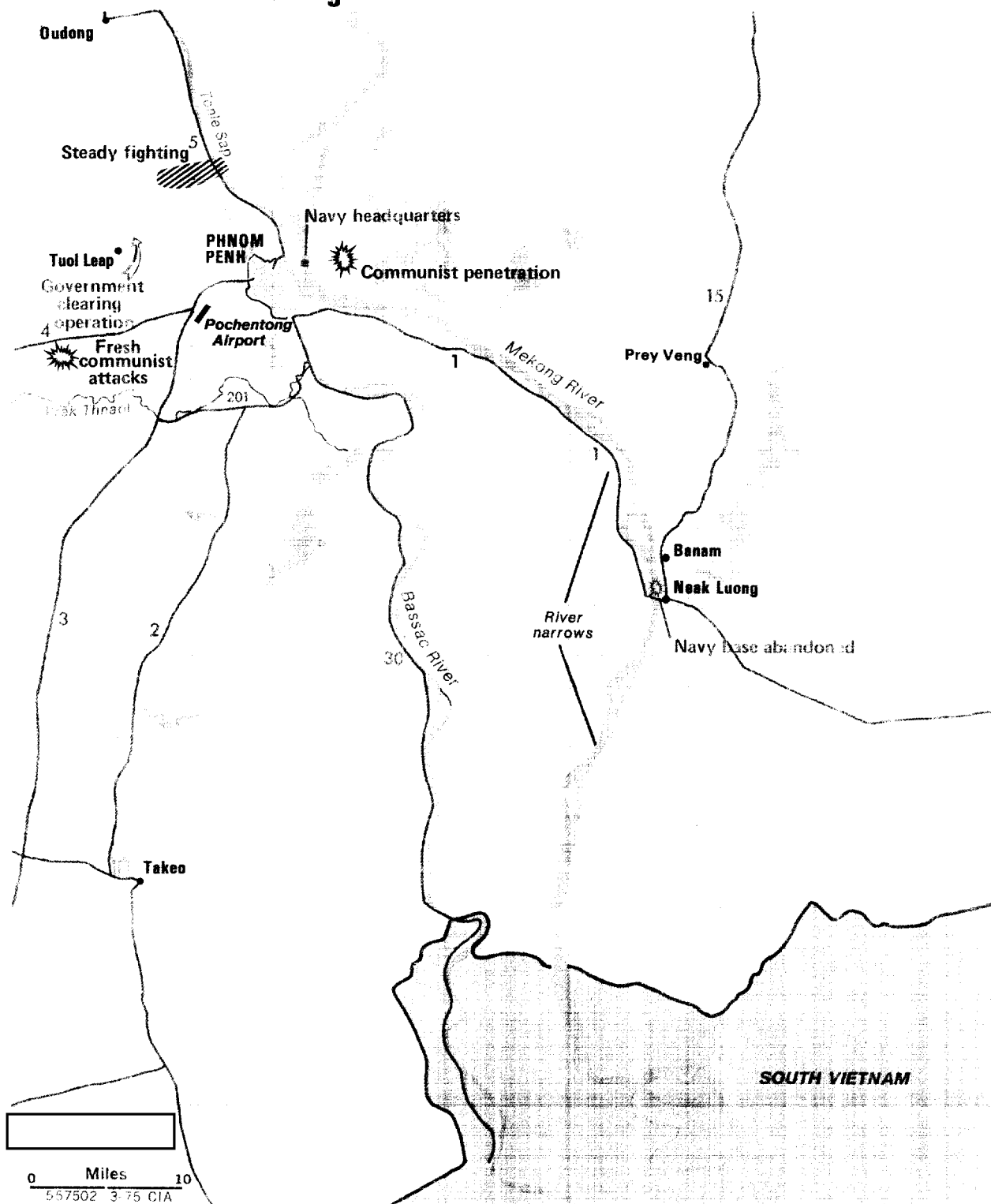
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Cambodia: Lower Mekong

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CAMBODIA

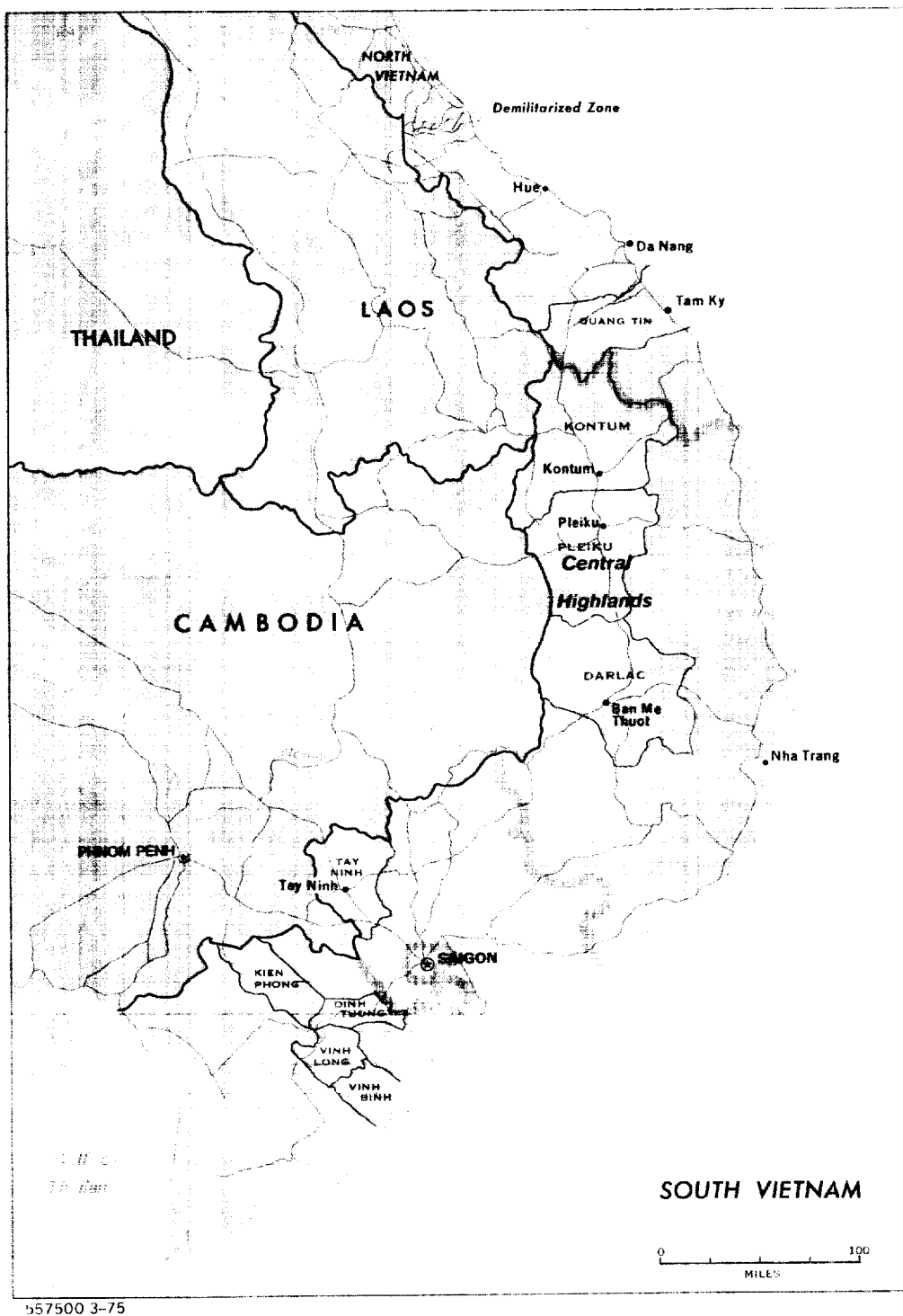
Government troops late on March 17 abandoned the floating navy support base anchored in the Mekong River just northwest of Neak Luong after intense Khmer communist shellings set the facility afire. Insurgent attacks also forced government units to abandon positions on a nearby island. Three navy patrol boats were lost in the fighting, but 13 other vessels and all personnel safely reached government lines.

In the Phnom Penh area, the government operation to eliminate insurgent rocket positions northeast of Tuol Leap is making progress, despite logistic and coordination problems. Insurgent rocket fire against Pochentong airport is less frequent, apparently as the result of the government counterattack. The communists have launched fresh attacks against government positions near Route 4 west of the airport. They are keeping steady pressure on Phnom Penh's northern defenses, presumably in an effort to divert government forces from the Tuol Leap operation.

Along the Mekong River near the capital, the insurgents have penetrated an area directly opposite Phnom Penh's waterfront. This communist move has forced the postponement of government plans to push insurgent mortar and recoilless rifle crews out of range of the main navy headquarters.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

Heavy fighting continues, with the communists increasing their attacks along the north-central coast and on the approaches to Saigon.

A potentially critical situation is developing in the northern provinces of Military Region 1. The government is speeding the withdrawal of the airborne division that has been based there, leaving the region with no reserve force. Only two battalions of marines are scheduled to replace the airborne forces.

The departure of the full airborne division has upset the region commander's plans to reinforce Quang Tin Province; he no longer can augment the forces in that province and expects it to fall to the communists. North Vietnamese units have stepped up the pressure on Tam Ky, the provincial capital.

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The airborne division's 3rd Brigade, which was in the process of moving to Saigon, will now be diverted to Military Region 2. Saigon has no immediate plans to commit this unit to battle, but it almost certainly will not be sent into the highlands. The remnants of the government units that had fought at Ban Me Thuot in Darlac Province, including the 23rd Division and ranger units, are having a tough time making their way to South Vietnamese lines. Even if the hard-hit 23rd can regroup along the coast, it will not be an effective combat unit for some time. President Thieu has abandoned his plans to recapture Ban Me Thuot.

The communists apparently captured all nine Americans, including the US AID official and the missionaries who were in Ban Me Thuot when it fell. A Viet Cong radiobroadcast on Sunday alluded to the Americans, claiming the South Vietnamese moved the region's military headquarters out of Pleiku "especially to spare the US advisers in Pleiku the fate of the nine Americans in Ban Me Thuot." The broadcast maintained that "foreigners,

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including honest Americans, will be well treated and released if they are captured, but this treatment will not be given to US military advisers. They are special cases because they have violated the Paris Agreement."

The withdrawal of civilians and military personnel from Kontum and Pleiku provinces is continuing. As of late yesterday, an estimated 200,000 had left Kontum and Pleiku cities. They included Montagnard inhabitants, South Vietnamese soldiers left behind when the region military headquarters was moved to Nha Trang, and regional and police forces who stayed behind to fight a holding action during the evacuation. Although the communists have cut the highway the refugees are using, the North Vietnamese are allowing the people to move out of the area.

In Military Region 3, there is heavy fighting in Tay Ninh Province. The communists are keeping the pressure on government positions south of the provincial capital. There have been no significant losses since Monday, when a key outpost east of Tay Ninh City fell. Units from three communist divisions and a number of independent regiments are attacking in the province.

Most South Vietnamese regulars in the area, including the 25th Division and parts of the 5th and 18th divisions, have fought well thus far. Regional forces, however, have abandoned a number of remote outposts in the face of communist tanks.

In the delta, a major new battle appears to be shaping up near the border of Kien Phong and Dinh Tuong provinces. A North Vietnamese division is concentrated in the area, and the government is moving to challenge it. The South Vietnamese are sending parts of the 21st and 7th divisions into the area. In addition, the government has ordered the evacuation of an important base on the Vinh Long - Vinh Binh border so that other 7th Division troops can be freed to move northeastward.

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PORTUGAL

Portugal's newly created Revolutionary Council yesterday issued a ban on political activity by the center-right Christian Democrats and two far-left groups. The ban will be in effect until after the election on April 12; the parties reportedly will be permitted to keep their offices open. Christian Democrat leader Major Sancho Osorio, who was a close associate of General Spínola, was accused of complicity in the unsuccessful coup attempt on March 11.

The Social Democratic Center was not included in the ban and will apparently be permitted to participate in the election. The Social Democrats appeal primarily to conservatives and have been described as "fascist" by leftists. The loss of party records in extremist attacks following the abortive coup will make it difficult, if not impossible, for the party to organize an effective election campaign.

The inclusion of leftist groups in the ban was expected, in view of the military's pledge to curb political violence. At least one of the two groups has frequently criticized the Armed Forces Movement, as well as the Communist Party, and is expected to continue or perhaps increase political violence. Several thousand supporters of this group, the Reorganizing Movement of the Proletarian Party, gathered outside the National Assembly building in Lisbon last night to protest the ban. The demonstrators dispersed without violence following a show of force by the military.

In the meantime, a cabinet shuffle authorized last week has still not materialized. The delay suggests that Prime Minister Gonçalves is having trouble finding suitable candidates or obtaining agreement on his recommendations. Gonçalves said last week that he would bring members of the Portuguese Democratic Movement, a communist front, into the government. Rumors of a marked shift to the left continue.

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In Oporto last Sunday, Foreign Minister Soares, the Socialist Party leader, came out against a cabinet change three weeks before the election. Appearing to challenge Goncalves, Soares said the communist-front group lacked the following to be included in the government. Soares added that he could best serve his country in his current position and that the Socialist campaign would open on schedule tomorrow.

Communist leader Cunhal's recent attacks on the center-left Popular Democratic Party indicate that there may be disagreement over the composition of the new cabinet. Cunhal claims that the Popular Democrats have abandoned their position as a member of the coalition government and have engaged in reactionary propagandizing. The Popular Democratic Party, in an exposed position since the coup attempt, has sought to defend itself by climbing on the Armed Forces Movement's bandwagon.

Vitor Alves, a minister without portfolio, told a US embassy source yesterday that an announcement is imminent that the election will be postponed. This lends substance to rumors that the balloting may be put off until April 25, the first anniversary of the overthrow of the Caetano regime.

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USSR

General Secretary Brezhnev, speaking at the Hungarian party congress in Budapest yesterday, presented a restrained, confident reiteration of Soviet foreign policy positions. Brezhnev said the USSR is giving "serious attention" to consolidating relations with the US, but otherwise he said nothing about bilateral matters. He made no mention of his coming trip to the US or of President Ford.

Brezhnev referred to progress at CSCE and the prospect of a "summit-level" windup in the coming months, but he did not mention June 30--a date he had proposed for the summit finale in letters to Western leaders earlier this month. He indicated that with CSCE out of the way, greater attention could be given to "military detente." He referred to the MBFR negotiations in Vienna and to the Vladivostok agreements on strategic arms limitation. In this context, Brezhnev spoke of the "gradual reduction," as well as limitation, of armed forces and armaments. He said, however, that such developments are not matters that could be decided "overnight."

For his East European audience, Brezhnev had a few pointed reminders of the past, when the "unity of our parties" rebuffed right-wing and leftist "distortions." He had high praise for his host, Hungarian party chief Kadar. Brezhnev also referred positively to the contributions of the Warsaw Pact and CEMA, particularly in enabling the East to do a better job than the West in promoting economic growth and stability at a time of worldwide economic trouble. At the same time, he admitted that East Europeans and the Soviets will have to coordinate their economic planning more effectively to meet the problems raised by higher prices for energy.

On the "crisis of capitalism," Brezhnev picked up the defensive theme of some of his ideologists that the West's economic woes have strengthened the hand of reactionary elements and hence are a source of potential trouble for the USSR. In terms reminiscent of his

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victory-through-contacts speech in 1973, he gave a nod to the importance of stepping up the ideological struggle around the globe.

Brezhnev hewed close to the standard Soviet line on the Middle East, and he made no reference to Secretary Kissinger's current round of negotiations. He referred to the importance of resuming negotiations in Geneva, satisfying the rights of the Palestinians--including their own statehood--and ensuring the existence of "all" (i.e., Israel as well as the Arab nations) states in the Middle East.

The Soviet leader did not mention China directly, and made only passing reference to the problems in Asia.



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SYRIA-PLO

The Syrians apparently have no clear idea of how to implement the joint Syrian-Palestinian political and military commands proposed by President Asad on March 8. Asad had not consulted with Palestine Liberation Organization leader Arafat before he made the proposal.

The warm public reaction accorded the Syrian proposal by Arafat and other PLO leaders reflects their need for Syrian support and a lack of attractive options, rather than real enthusiasm for closer association with the Syrians. At a time of strained relations with Egypt, the PLO cannot afford to offend the Syrians.

Fedayeen leaders are always suspicious of the Syrians and are likely to drag out--perhaps indefinitely--actual implementation of the Syrian proposals. The chief danger in the Syrian initiative, in Palestinian eyes, is that it might pave the way for Damascus to seize control of the PLO. Asad, the Palestinians fear, could even try to use increased leverage within the PLO to replace Arafat as chairman with a Fatah member more sympathetic to Syria or with a representative of the Syrian-controlled Saiqa fedayeen group. Arafat and his associates also worry that closer association with the Damascus government would further restrict their freedom to make policy and could result in Syrian army control of fedayeen operations outside Syria.

Despite these reservations, the PLO will want to keep the idea of closer ties with Syria alive. To the relatively moderate leaders of the PLO, including Arafat, even a notional alliance with Syria would strengthen the Palestinians' bargaining position vis-a-vis Egypt, Israel, and the US. It would also better enable them to endure any showdown with their radical colleagues from the "rejectionist" groups, some members of which are already being detained by the Syrians.

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For Arafat, Asad's proposal may also offer one way of getting around Israel's refusal to negotiate with the PLO by including PLO representatives in a Syrian delegation to the Geneva talks. Asad said publicly on March 9 that his offer might provide such an opportunity, although he pointed out that such an association could just as easily keep Syria away from Geneva.

Asad may hope that his proposal might provide a framework for resolving the dispute between the PLO and Jordan and eventually bring Amman into closer military cooperation with Syria. The Jordanians are suspicious of the Palestinians and the Syrians, however, and so far have indicated no interest in such a scheme or in becoming more actively involved in general peace negotiations.

Israeli officials have expressed grave concern that the Syrian proposal would "not add to the success" of Secretary Kissinger's current mission, and the Israeli press has labeled Asad's move an effort to foil the political talks. The press argues that Asad, Arafat, and the Soviets have decided to increase the pressure on Sadat not to offer any political concessions in return for a further Israeli withdrawal in the Sinai.

Egypt has not commented officially on the Syrian proposal. Cairo has put out the word, however, that it would have no objection to participating in a unified Arab delegation at the Geneva conference.

US officials in Beirut have observed an intensification of contact between Soviet and PLO officials that may be related to the Syrian proposal. Neither side has given any clear indication that the consultations concern the "joint-command" concept. Several knowledgeable observers have told US officials, however, that the subject has been discussed extensively and that the Soviets look favorably on the idea.

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GREECE-TURKEY

Ankara has requested that Athens issue a notice to airmen announcing a planned Turkish air force exercise in the Aegean Sea area, beginning on March 20. The Aegean falls within Athens' flight information region, making it necessary for Ankara to coordinate all air activities planned in that area with Greece.

A request for a warning notice is usually a routine procedure between neighboring countries. Since last year, however, both Greece and Turkey have used the management of flights over the Aegean for political purposes.

Last March, Athens ignored a similar request from Ankara, and the Turks went ahead with their exercise, increasing tensions substantially. The Turks in August tried to expand the Istanbul flight information region to approximate their claim to the continental shelf, which divides the Aegean roughly in half. The Greeks responded by closing the airspace adjacent to the Istanbul flight information region and by suspending all communications with Turkish air traffic control.

The Turkish request for Greece to publish the warning notice is tacit recognition of Greek responsibility for air traffic in the area. A Greek accession to the request will therefore be a further move to reduce friction between the two countries.

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TURKEY

President Koruturk is sounding out Turkish political leaders and is considering several options in his continuing effort to break the six-month-old political deadlock.

In the maneuvering to organize a government with majority support in Parliament, the formula that has received the most attention in Ankara in recent days is a government composed of the small right-of-center Democratic Party plus several independents. Such a government would be headed by an independent, probably acting prime minister Sadi Irmak, and supported in Parliament by Bulent Ecevit's Republican People's Party.

Ecevit himself has also been mentioned as a possible formateur, even though he failed to achieve the necessary majority in two previous efforts. The President is apparently concentrating on finding some way to create a government supported by the Democratic Party and Ecevit as the only alternative to Suleyman Demirel's National Front, a coalition of four rightist parties. Both the President and the military remain strongly opposed to Demirel and his front, primarily because it includes two rightist groups they consider totally irresponsible.

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ITALY

Italy's governing parties reached a compromise earlier this week on how to deal with increasing crime and political violence. Some of the most contentious issues were not resolved, however, and may surface again.

The four parties--the Christian Democrats, Socialists, Social Democrats, and Republicans--agreed to enact legislation that would improve police pay and working conditions and restrict the use of "provisional liberty," under which alleged offenders may be released pending trial.

These decisions should ease some of the discontent recently evident in police ranks. Under present regulations, a new recruit in the 80,000-man public security forces is paid one of the lowest salaries in Italy--about \$150 a month. The police will also welcome the restricted use of "provisional liberty," but they want the government to go further. In particular, they want to lift the regulation that allows them to use their weapons only when fired upon. Some elements of the police also are demanding the right to unionize.

The latter issues were bitterly contested within the government, and party leaders have apparently agreed to put them aside for the time being. The Socialists had been pushing hard for the right of the police to organize unions, but the other three parties were opposed. A Social Democratic proposal to give the police the right to detain suspects not charged with a specific crime was also shelved because of Socialist opposition.

Christian Democratic leader Fanfani reportedly hinted prior to the meeting that he would push for early parliamentary elections if no agreement was reached on the law-and-order issue. This may have encouraged the Socialists, in particular, to take a moderate line, because they fear they would not do as well in a parliamentary race as they expect to do in the nationwide local elections set for this spring. The local contests would be postponed if parliamentary elections were called now.

The agreement may make law and order a less divisive issue within the government. The dispute could heat up as the local elections draw near, however, especially if the measures do not curb crime.

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CANADA

Prime Minister Trudeau has returned from his lengthy tour of West European capitals with little to show in terms of practical results for Canada. On the domestic front, his government is on the defensive because of growing labor unrest, inflationary wage settlements, and charges of corruption touching his own Liberal Party.

During his 17-day tour of Western Europe, the Prime Minister emphasized Canada's desire to balance its overwhelming dependence on the US with a "contractual" relationship with the European Community. In The Hague, Bonn, Rome, London, and Dublin, Trudeau found polite listeners but no firm commitments. The Europeans are apparently still waiting for Ottawa to define precisely what it desires in its so-called "contractual" relationship.

For its part, the EC hopes to decide by fall between three optional approaches to the Canadian request: a strictly commercial agreement, an agreement establishing the framework for industrial cooperation, or postponement of negotiations with Canada until the current multilateral trade negotiations in Geneva are concluded.

An obstacle to an agreement with the EC is Canada's desire to become an exporter of finished products, rather than primarily a supplier of raw materials. The EC countries, on the other hand, are anxious to tap the vast mineral and timber resources of Canada, in return for which they hope to expand markets for their finished products.

The other major goal of Trudeau's trip was to urge Bonn, The Hague, and Rome to proceed promptly with ratification of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Ottawa is anxious to provide markets with the Canadian-produced Candu nuclear reactors. After India's use of material from a Canadian-supplied reactor to explode a nuclear device last year, Ottawa has insisted that no nuclear deals will be made with any nation that has not ratified the Non-Proliferation Treaty and agreed to additional bilateral safeguards arrangements.

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Italian officials assured Trudeau that their ratification of the treaty was progressing rapidly and would soon be presented to Parliament. Bonn and The Hague indicated they were only waiting for the Italians to approve the treaty before concluding their own ratification process.

Although Trudeau told Canadians before he left on his trip that he did not expect to reach any firm agreements, he is being criticized by the press and Parliament for his failure to return with more concrete results. The sharpest barbs have been reserved for his extended stay in Europe--including skiing holidays--at a time when Canada's domestic troubles have mounted. The US embassy in Ottawa concludes that the Prime Minister's trip and its meager results may have left him vulnerable to criticism "for swinging while Canada burns." [REDACTED]

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THAILAND

The fate of Khukrit Pramot's proposed center-right coalition will be decided today when the National Assembly convenes for a vote of confidence. Khukrit must gain a majority of those present if he is to head Thailand's first popularly elected government under the new parliamentary system.

Khukrit should win the vote, given the strong support he is receiving from army commander Krit Siwara. [REDACTED]

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Nevertheless, house speaker Prasit, whose conservative party is supporting Khukrit, has said that the coalition is uneasy over the approaching confidence vote. He believes that it could go either way.

Prasit's nervousness reflects the uncertainty of Thailand's present state of affairs. Thailand has now been without a duly constituted government for over seven weeks, and the government that finally does emerge is likely to be unstable at best, in view of the multitude of political parties and the country's inexperience in parliamentary politics. Many politicians, including Khukrit himself, have said that new elections will have to be held at some point in the near future, if only in order to weed out many of the splinter groups that are contributing to Thailand's instability. [REDACTED]

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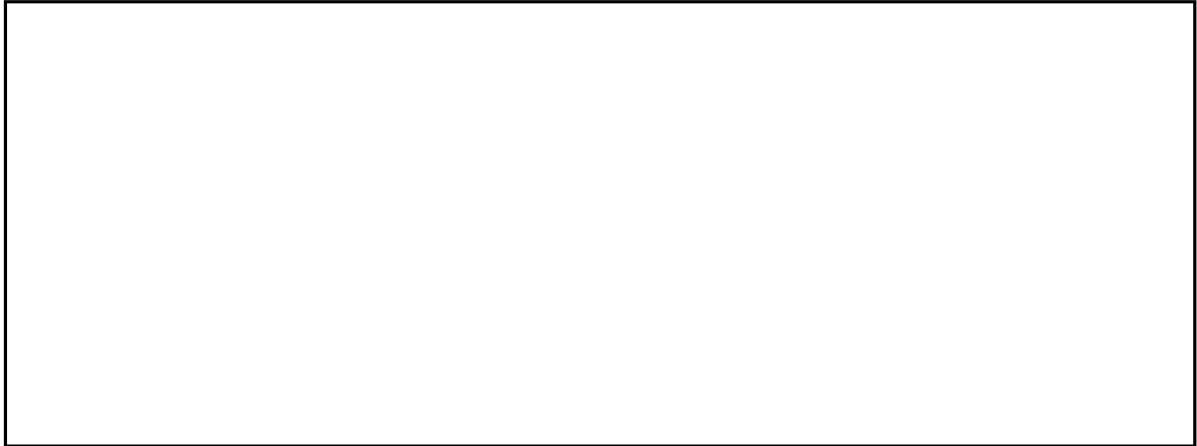
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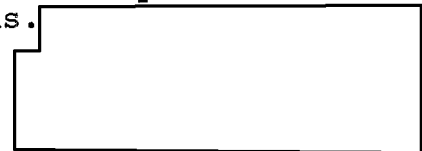


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ETHIOPIA

The Ethiopian government yesterday executed a Galla tribal leader, Tadessa Biru, and five other men for taking up arms against the ruling military council. Tadessa was arrested last week for inciting a Galla rebellion in the provinces. The other five men executed were not identified, but initial press reports indicate they were arrested for participating in recent insurgent activities.

Tadessa's execution will harden the resolve of his supporters to overthrow the military council. They are pressing their insurgency in the countryside. The executions may also increase opposition to the council among other Ethiopians. After the executions of 59 prisoners last November, the council had promised there would be no more summary executions.



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